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Bariatric Surgery “Life Changing and Life Saving”

This month’s article is personal. I have a family member who I hope will consider Bariatric Surgery. I also work with a woman who had Bariatric Surgery 3 years ago. She is my nurse. She looks incredible, lost 90 pounds, and considers it the best money she ever spent. She also is my patient and all of her medical conditions were “cured” by her procedure. When she brings in “before” pictures, I have trouble recognizing her.

Obesity is a condition where excess body fat has accumulated to the extent that it adversely affects your health. Most people recognize obesity on sight. In a doctor’s office a number called the body mass index (BMI) is calculated. Normal healthy values are 18.5-24.9. Anything above 30 is obese. Anything above 40 is “morbidly obese”. Obesity is a leading cause of death worldwide. There are an estimated 61.3 million (30.5%) obese adults in the United States. 9.6 million adults are “morbidly obese”.

Many common diseases are strongly associated with obesity. Life expectancy for a morbidly obese man is reduced by 20 years, and for a morbidly obese woman by 5 years.

The primary treatment for obesity is dieting and physical exercise. Anti-obesity drugs may be tried. When these treatments fail the last resort is surgical intervention or “Bariatric Surgery”

To qualify for Bariatric Surgery an individual must meet the following criteria.

- 1) BMI exceeds 40 (approx 100 lbs. overweight), or a BMI of over 35 with weight related health problems (Diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, sleep apnea, etc)
- 2) Candidates must be ready to make long-term changes in their eating, exercise, and lifestyle habits
- 3) Candidates must be committed to long-term medical followup.

How does Bariatric Surgery work?

Simple, the Bariatric Surgeon alters your digestive tract (stomach and small intestine) making it impossible to eat much food at one sitting. There are 2 main types of surgery.

- 1) Restrictive Surgery (Lap band, Stomach Stapling, or vertical banded gastroplasty). These procedures alter the size of the stomach to restrict calories. The size is reduced to the size of an egg using special staples or a silicone band. These are reversible and don't fundamentally alter the anatomy of the digestive system
- 2) Malabsorptive Surgery (Roux-en Y). This is a 2 part procedure. First, the surgeon reduces the size of the stomach, then he bypasses the first portion of the small intestine. This causes food to pass more rapidly through the digestive tract. Even if the patient over-eats, fewer calories will be absorbed.

The Success rate for Bariatric Surgery is very high with the vast majority of patients reducing their excess weight by at least 50% and maintaining that reduction for at least 5 years. High blood pressure is cured in 50%, Type 2 Diabetes is cured in 80%, Sleep Apnea is cured in 75%, Shortness of Breath is relieved in 80%.

The cost of the procedure can be substantial and not all health insurance plans cover it. If you are considering this treatment you should check your individual coverage. The cost can run from \$13,000 and up for the operation. After weight loss is achieved there may also be the need for plastic surgery to remove excess skin. These procedures are not covered by insurance and frequently can run over \$20,000.

There are risks to both procedures, but with experienced surgeons in an appropriate hospital the risks are minimized. Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood has been designated as a "Center for Excellence" for Bariatric Surgery. There are free informational seminars offered on a regular basis for those considering the surgery. One group of surgeons I highly recommend has a very informative website at www.hollywoodbariatrics.com.

Obesity is an extremely common problem and a very serious health concern. It goes far beyond cosmetics. It is an excellent reason to visit your doctor and begin a discussion. Getting your weight under control will improve your appearance, your energy level, and your health. For some, surgery is an excellent choice.

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Office Hours:

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Thursdays 9:00 AM - 12:15 PM

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